

**EXEGESIS OF GALATIANS 3:26-28**

**by**

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### I. Introduction

In this paper we will discuss the important New Testament passage, Galatians 3:26-28. It is important because since Paul turns to the Gentile Christians and defines their status before God. As Betz has pointed out this is the goal toward which Paul had been driving all along.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore it contains three concise statements<sup>2</sup> which demand our special attention. Particularly the third parallel statement "there is no male and female" is believed to have a bearing on the contemporary issue of the role of men and women in the church. This phrase seems to imply that from henceforth in the Christian church the sex distinctions between men and women have lost their significance.<sup>3</sup> As Clark has pointed out, there are indeed many who understand this text in the sense that ideally in Christ there are no role differences between men and women. As compared with other texts in the Pauline writings that assert such a difference, Galatians 3:28 is viewed as a "great breakthrough." Some, as Clark has observed, hold that this text is the locus classicus in Paul's teaching about the role of men and women in the church.<sup>4</sup> This position is strongly disputed by those who are convinced that the passage under consideration does not represent a major biblical statement on men's and women's roles.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, in order to gain a clear understanding of Paul's concern in this text it will be essential to pay attention to the

following aspects: (1) context, (2) form and structure of the passage, (3) Paul's theological argument, (4) a detailed analysis of the passage, (5) other pertinent passages in the Pauline epistles dealing with the role of men and women in the church. But no attempt will be made to engage in a thorough exegesis of them here for that will be the objective of other papers.

## II. Context

Galatians 3:28 forms part of a section in the epistle in which he discusses the purpose of the law in God's plan. Beginning with 3:1 the apostle points to the sad state of the Galatians who against better knowledge had experienced a relapse into legalism. This happened, Paul points out, at the expense of a true life in the Spirit.

Appealing to the life of Abraham the apostle seeks to demonstrate that faith in God rather than the works of the Torah is the decisive factor in obtaining the right status before God. From Paul's point of view the Torah was not given for the purpose of providing righteousness and life as Judaism generally assumed. The Jewish Torah rather served to "enclose everything under sin (3:22) and to keep it imprisoned (3:23)." Until the coming of Christ the Torah merely served as a custodian (paidagogos, 3:24-25). But with the appearance of Christ faith in Him became the constitutive basis for one's Christian experience. Here the question arises, What is the specific issue provoking Paul's explanation of the place of the

law? It was the matter of circumcision.<sup>6</sup> Finally in 3:26-28 Paul presents his main point, one which he wanted to drive home all along: Through baptism in Christ men and women can now enjoy a new and exalted status before God.

### III. Form and Structure of the Passage

The composition and structure of this passage represents an interesting phenomenon. In the opinion of some scholars there are a number of components in the passage which suggest to them that it must have had its place and function in an early Christian baptismal liturgy.<sup>7</sup> An analysis of the passage yields the following results: The section 3:26-28 is composed of six lines.<sup>8</sup> The first and the sixth lines are parallel except for the phrase dia tes pisteos, a formula frequently used by the apostle in other references. In the present context it is viewed by some as an interpretative addition by the apostle.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from the unique structure of the passage scholars have pointed out that later Christian liturgies do contain similar statements found in Galatians 3:28. Thus, the structure and similarity to statements found in later Christian liturgies is seen as evidence that our passage, in part or as a whole has its life setting in a pre-Pauline liturgical context.<sup>10</sup> This conclusion, however, is hardly warranted by the evidence presented.

Other scholars, in search of the origin or life setting of our passage, have pointed to the relationship of our passage and the

berakot opening of the Jewish morning prayers. In this context the Jew gives thanks to God that he did not create him a Gentile, an ignorant person, a slave, or a woman.<sup>11</sup> Some go so far as to suggest that Galatians 3:28 is based upon that prayer.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, analogous statements of gratitude are not unique with the Jews but are known among the ancient Greeks and Persians, for example.<sup>13</sup>

In his doctoral dissertation MacDonald<sup>14</sup> has argued that in Galatians 3:26-28 Paul was indebted to a Gnostic baptismal tradition. He maintains that the garment two-are-one oral Jesus tradition found in the Gospel of the Egyptians, the Gospel of Thomas and 2 Clement had a baptismal Sitz im Leben, because its motifs appear almost exclusively in baptismal contexts.

The idea behind this tradition was this: "In baptism one trod on 'the garment of shame'; i.e., the body, and united the two sexes into one, so that there was 'neither male nor female'" The difference in the Pauline version, however, is this: One does not put off the body in baptism, but rather one puts on Christ.

Male and female do not become one in a baptismal return to the primordial androgyne, but all become one in Christ Jesus. The few proposals discussed thus far focusing on the actual life setting or origin of our passage remain largely unconvincing. Consequently one must seek to understand Paul's message within the context of his overall theological argument and on the basis of a careful exegesis of the text as well as in the light of some key texts found

in his other epistles.

#### **IV. Paul's Theological Argument**

Scholars view the Epistle to the Galatians as a first systematic apology of Christianity. As such, it is not directed to outsiders but rather to Christians themselves. In it Paul defends "the truth of the gospel."<sup>15</sup>

Having experienced the divine gift of the Spirit, the Galatians seemed to have considered themselves as "the people of the Spirit." This means that they had high religious claims and expectations. According to Betz, the concept of "freedom" seems to best sum up their basic self-understanding.<sup>16</sup> To them this concept meant liberation from this evil world with its repressive social and cultural laws and conventions. Consequently they were opinionated toward the abolition of cultural and social distinctions between Greeks and non-Greeks, Jews and non-Jews, as well as the social system of slavery and the subordination of women. Any accomplishment and advancement along these lines were seen as the fruits of the Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately these new converts had opened the door to Paul's opponents, the Judaizers, for they had come to doubt the validity and viability of the apostle's version of Christianity. Their method of dealing with "transgression" in the church were: Torah and circumcision. In this way they sought to protect the newer Christian life from deterioration and destruction.<sup>18</sup>

In defense of the truth of the gospel and of his concept of freedom Paul advances a series of arguments: (1) Paul's most important argument which runs through his entire letter is the argument from experience. It may be stated as follows: Their experience of salvation was consistent with God's work. It was a matter of divine grace rather than of human standards or merits. Furthermore, the apostle also points out that the Jewish Christians, though born as Jews had become believers in Christ because they had become convinced that they could not experience justification before God through "works of the Torah." Therefore, it would make no sense to demand that non-Jewish believers in Christ should submit to a Jewish ritual. Paul's second major argument is proof from Scripture. In 3:6-14 he makes it clear that God's promise to Abraham and his offspring was made on account of their father rather than their observance of the Torah. Galatians 3:19-25 represents an excursus on the Torah. It supports the argument made by the interpretation of the Abrahamic tradition. In 3:19 Paul, giving four definitions of the Torah, seeks to show that God never intended that the Torah should be a precondition of salvation. Its real purpose was rather to make salvation by grace necessary.

After this excursus on the Torah Paul reminds the Galatians of the message of salvation they had received at their baptism. On account of this message they had experienced the joy of divine salvation apart from the Torah and circumcision. Their acceptance of the message of the Judaizers would represent a thing away from

the Christian faith and a relapse into Judaism.

In a following argument in 4:12-20 Paul recalls to the Galatians of his initial contact with them when he first came to bring the gospel message to them. During his work in their midst a friendship between the Galatians and the apostle was struck. These friendship ties which withstood many temptations were not to be severed lightly. Central in his final argument which is the cutting edge of the letter is the concept of freedom. But the Pauline concept of freedom is incompatible with the Jewish concept of salvation, a fact which the Galatians are to realize. His appeal to the Christian at Galatia may be summed up as follows: Circumcision is nothing, uncircumcision is nothing. The only thing that counts is a new creation.<sup>19</sup>

#### **V. Exegesis of Galatians 3:26-28**

The entire passage of Galatians 3:23-29 centers on being "in Christ" and the status obtained through being in Christ.<sup>20</sup> In the first phrase of verse 26 the apostle compares the condition under the law and the condition reached through faith in Christ. He then goes on to discuss how this status is given. Through baptism the believer is one with Christ.

The theme of this passage may be stated as follows: Faith in Christ makes possible the original relationship with God intended in the creation of the human race. It is a relationship between God and His Son.<sup>21</sup> With this general picture in mind we will now focus



our attention upon the individual statements of the passage.

In 3:26 the apostle states, "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith" (pantes gar hui theou este dia tes pisteos en Christo Iesou).

Two important concepts emerge from the statement: (1) the sonship of God and (2) faith. In the context of Paul's argument it is clear that the sonship of God is not the result of the ritual of circumcision. The circumcised has no particular standing before God. It is rather faith being proclaimed in and with the gospel which leads to one's incorporation into the body of Christ.

In Paul's argument one's sonship of God may be equated with that of Abraham's, for in verse 29 he states, "And if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's offspring" (ara tou Abraam sperma este). The basis of this sonship (huiiothesia) is adoption (4:5) and the fact that God sent His Son. In 4:6 the apostle points out that in consequence of one's participation in the sonship God has sent the Spirit of His Son.<sup>22</sup>

Christ, according to Paul, is the ground of faith because He is the one who in fulfillment of the prophecy lives through faith ek (dia) pisteos. He, therefore, is the true seed of faithful Abraham and the heirs of all promises. In the present context he plays the role of a universal representative figure enacting a pattern of redemption which then determines the existence of those who follow him. They are baptized into Christ. They are recipients of the Spirit which enables them to live through faith ek (dia) pisteos, in

conformity to the pattern grounded in Jesus Christ.<sup>23</sup>

"For as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (hosoi gar eis Christon ebaptisthete, Christon enedusasthe). It is noteworthy that this statement is Paul's explicit reference to baptism in Galatians.<sup>24</sup> In the present context it functions as a reminder of this ceremony and its meaning. The word hosoi specifies the "all" of verse 26, as all Christians, for they were all baptized. Paul's point in this verse is this: Circumcision may make a man an Israelite, but baptism makes him a Christ's man. Put differently, when a person is baptized he becomes so thoroughly identified with Christ that it is no longer he who lives, but it is Christ who lives in him.<sup>25</sup>

Paul's reference to baptism is to be seen in its proper relationship to circumcision. Through the latter rite a person becomes an Israelite and in the context of Paul's argument it is clear that the circumcision party in Galatia wanted the Gentile Christians to become full fledged <sup>e</sup>proselytes by being circumcised. Paul counters this attempt by asserting that through baptism one does not only become a part of Abraham's offspring. ~~According to the apostle,~~ <sup>but also</sup> Christians obtain the status of mature sonship through <sup>Baptism</sup> baptism, ~~which~~ is an initiation into Christ. Thus men and women are indeed the sons and daughters of Christ.<sup>26</sup>

In view of this situation Paul declares that through one's acceptance of Christ there is no longer such a thing as one might express in modern terms: white or black, master or servant,

capitalist or wage earner, right or left, etc. While there is good reason to believe that such distinctions will continue to exist the Christian can now no longer regard them as ultimate. There is simply no room for them.<sup>27</sup>

With verse 28 Paul's argument reaches its climax. Here we notice the presence of three sets of contrasts. These seem to be descriptive of the existing social inequality and the differentiation of the sexes.<sup>28</sup>

The first formula, ouk eni Ioudaios oude Ellen ("neither Jew nor Greek"), may be a variation of the well-known Hellenistic slogan "Greeks and barbarians."<sup>29</sup> According to Windisch the present formula seems to point to Hellenistic Judaism as its origin. It programmatically proclaims both a universalizing and a hellenizing of Judaism.<sup>30</sup>

According to Betz this formula, which in the opinion of some is to be taken in a religious rather than a national sense, declares that in the Christian community, the religious, cultural, and social distinctions between Jew and Greek are abolished.<sup>31</sup>

This view seems to find confirmation in the light of Romans 10:12 where Paul speaks of the removal of distinctions which customarily separate the Jew and the non-Jew: "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek" (ou gar estin diastole; see also Romans 3:1-20; 9:3-5). In the light of such considerations one might conclude that Paul was primarily concerned here to initiate a social reform, but the intent of this first formula is rather to assure the

Galatians that although they are Gentiles they have their share in the promise made to Abraham who is the ancestor of the Jews according to the flesh.<sup>32</sup> Since they have been redeemed through Christ and have received the gifts of the Spirit granted by Him any preference of Jew to Greek, master to slave, and man to woman, vanishes.<sup>33</sup> Put differently, in matters of salvation all members of the body of Christ are equal.

Circumcision, of course, implied division but the death of Christ as a means of salvation creates one community. No longer can there be any barrier separating otherwise desperate groups.<sup>34</sup> Several scholars have pointed out the dimension of universality in the passage. It is universal in the sense that through the gospel everyone is called to a life in which the relationship between God and man has or might become what it was intended from the very beginning. Through Christ all differences between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian and Scythian, slave and free man have been removed. He, Christ, is all in all (Col 3:11).<sup>35</sup>

The removal of such differences within the body of Christ does not merely find expression in words but in reality. Commenting on this point Ebeling observes that an absolute priority is to be given to the fact that in the present context the apostle refrains from giving any definition or insight as to what separates Jews and Gentiles before God. The fact remains that in Christ they are all one: the Israel of God (6:16).<sup>36</sup> But while in and through Christ all believers are one, what happens to their social, cultural, racial,

and sexual distinctions? We wish to elaborate on this point below.

With his second formula, Paul moves from the religious tension to the most prominent social difference of his day. With boldness the apostle proclaims, ouk eni doulos oude eleutheros, "there is neither slave nor free man." Thus he affirms that in the ekklesia the slave is no longer a slave and the freedom of the free is measured with a different measure than that applied by his own social class. Through Christ both are free. Yet at the same time they positively belong to Him. They are His slaves and therefore no longer slavishly committed to any secular power.<sup>37</sup>

The third formula, considered by some scholars to be the strangest<sup>38</sup> but for our purpose the most important one, proclaims that "there is neither male and female" (ouk eni arsen kai thelu).

It is noteworthy that in contrast with the preceding statements this one names the sexes in the neuter. According to Betz this indicates that not only the social differences between man and woman ("roles") are indicated but the biological distinctions as well.<sup>39</sup>

This particular statement is without parallel in the New Testament, but an abundance of them occur in gnosticism, particularly in the apocryphal gospels in other gospel materials from Nag Hammadi and in 2 Clement 12.<sup>40</sup>

As to the interpretation of this formula, Betz<sup>41</sup> has indicated that one has the choice between several options (~~Betz, 1957~~): (1) In parallelism to the preceding formula this statement can be

interpreted as a declaration of the social emancipation of women.

(2) If one were to interpret the formula in the context of apocryphal and gnostic parallels, it would then claim the metaphysical removal of the biological sex distinctions as the result of one's experience in Christ. In that case one is not merely concerned with social emancipation but rather with androgyny.

(3) A third, but less probable interpretation leans toward the view that Paul has adopted stoic anthropology, for in the teachings of the stoics women like all human beings have the same nature as men. This interpretation, however, is not convincing because Paul does not make use of this stoic doctrine.<sup>42</sup>

Betz is open to the possibility that behind Galatians 3:28 there lies a Christ-anthropos myth or the doctrine of an androgynous Christ-redeemer. In that case the declaration of the dissolution of all sexual distinctions would be informed by a particular Christology in which Christ figures as the androgynous anthropos.<sup>43</sup> This view implies that Christ's body would be androgynous and so would be the Christians who are members of this body. This interpretation however is also unconvincing. It is at best hypothetical.

But what about the idea that Paul's third statement is to be interpreted as a declaration of the social emancipation of women?

At this point it is essential to understand Paul's statement within its total context. As we have seen thus far, the apostle was combatting a Judaizing element in the Galatian church. These Judaizers insisted that one's salvation depended upon strict

obedience to the Torah and they placed special emphasis upon the practice of circumcision. In view of that situation it is safe to assume that the Judaizers did not only seek to impose legalistic practices upon the new Gentile converts, but that they also discriminated against them. In order to overcome this problem Paul at once declared exultingly that through redemption in Christ the earthly distinctions of race, social class and sex have no significance as to the validity or quality of one's relationship with God.<sup>44</sup>

Paul's point is clear: In the light of their redemption in Christ and the gift of the Spirit granted by Him all cultural, social, and sexual distinctions vanish. In matters of salvation all men are equal before God.

This ideal picture of the oneness of Christians regardless of their cultural, social, or sexual status illustrates what this intimate bond with Christ will do to human relationships. It conquers all things and establishes them. It also removes any existing opposition of the Judaizers in the Galatian church.

#### **1. Redemption in Christ and Social Differences**

It is true that redemption in Christ enables the Christian to overcome all social, religious, and natural distinctions but does this mean that they are no longer relevant? In Clark's opinion, Galatians 3:28 points toward a spiritual partnership in mutual love. It does not point to a leveling of all differences of social condition and social role. The true Christian freedom, as he sees it, is the freedom to be sons and daughters of God. In this freedom the

Christian can live the life of the Spirit in mutual love and service regardless of earthly circumstances. For Clark the teaching of Galatians 3:28 is this: Men and women are one in Christ. They are joint heirs to the grace of eternal life, both fully part of the body of Christ. They are both sons and daughters of God, both with access to the Father and fully responsible before Him. Both are called to build up one another and the body of Christ in love and to worship the Father in Spirit and in truth.<sup>45</sup>

While Paul's message has profound social implications in the sense that it provides an ideal setting for mutual appreciation and love, Stott has reminded us that the apostle did not advocate social equality as a program. He rightly observes that verse 28 does not mean that racial, social, and sexual differences are actually obliterated. He points out that in reality Christians are not color-blind to the point where they cannot tell whether a person is black, brown, yellow, or white.<sup>46</sup>

**A. Paul's attitude toward slavery.** In regard to slavery, for instance, it should be pointed out that the apostle did not abolish the whole institution of slavery but he admonished slaves to remain in the state in which they were called (1 Cor 7:20). In the opinion of some this was due to the fact that differences were overcome from within. A slave did not change his social status. He remained a slave, but in Christ he was a freedman. Put differently, the matter of liberation was an internal process, which in the immediate context did not effect one's social status. As Cousar has pointed



out, being with Christ does not do away with the distinction of Jew or Greek, male or female, even slave or free, but it makes these differences before God irrelevant.<sup>47</sup>

Paul himself made a good start in his defense of the right of Gentiles to be present with the Jews on a common basis of a social gathering. Therefore he is not merely concerned that the Gentile-Jew distinction is being disregarded at the worship services but also at social gatherings.

Paul's attitude toward the slave question, however, comes into focus in his handling of Onesimus, a runaway slave. In the light of Philemon 16 we discover that he returns him to his owner Philemon not as a slave but rather as a beloved brother . . . both in the flesh and in the Lord. The reason why Paul sent him back to his owner was to demonstrate Philemon's goodness.

But what do we make of a passage such as 1 Cor 7:20-22? Here Paul suggests that slaves should merely accept their plight and not attempt to be freed. Cousar has reminded us, however, that these verses are found in the same context where the apostle discourages the Corinthians from getting married unless it was necessary. He rightly points out that Paul's counsel given in these verses is strongly influenced by his eschatological orientation. From Paul's point of view the end was coming soon. Thus Christians were not to change their present status. In the "household rules" as in Ephesians 6:5, for example, Paul takes the same position as he exhorts slaves to be obedient to their masters. The status of

masters, on the other hand, is relativized by the reminder that they too have a Master in heaven who is impartial.

In the light of these considerations we have noticed two aspects in Paul's attitude toward slavery: (1) In his dealings with Onesimus he has set an example as to how Christians were to act in similar situations. (2) Paul never attacks slavery head-on as an institution.<sup>48</sup>

**B. Paul's attitude toward women.** At this point we will engage in a discussion of some key texts such as 1 Corinthians 11:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34ff. in order to find out whether Galatians 3:28 is indeed incompatible with NT passages which enjoin role differences between men and women. More specifically we wish to address the question whether a "contradiction" as "tension" exists between the statement "Here is no more and female" and the idea that there should be some kind of subordination of woman to man. While in both Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians 11:11-12 the apostle affirms that in the man-woman relationship both man and woman are equal. Nevertheless in 1 Corinthians 11:3 the woman is portrayed as being in a subordinate position to her husband whose head is Christ whose head is God. However, the point of Paul's argument is simply this: The body of Christ has a structure and the woman is part of that structure as one person with her husband. She is under his headship of their relationship.<sup>49</sup>

While it is true that according to 1 Corinthians 11 the woman is given a place below the man, it should be pointed out that verse

11 makes it abundantly clear that she is not the slave of the man. But why does the apostle underline the headship of men in 1 Corinthians 11? It is to be admitted that Paul assigns a subordinate role to the woman, but he does not do it because the man has a greater disparity than she. On the contrary the apostle attempts to solve two problems at once. On the one side he had to put the emancipated Corinthian ladies in their places, but on the other Paul seeks to prevent the woman from being considered inferior.<sup>50</sup>

The key phrase in 1 Corinthians 11:11-12, so essential for our understanding of the text, is "in the Lord." To be in the Lord or to be in Christ is to live in the sphere of faith (Gal 5:6, Eph 1:17). In that sphere the woman is not without the man nor the man without the woman. But if both are in Christ then why is it necessary for the woman to be distinguished from the man when she prays or prophecies? Apparently Paul's statement does not imply that unity in Christ results in the disappearance of every difference. The only thing Paul does imply is that in regard to higher things, or in matters of salvation both men and women are equal.<sup>51</sup>

Verse 12 gives the reason for verse 11. The oneness of man and woman in the Lord is based on the fact that both are created by God. For that reason they are related to one another. In the order of Creation woman is of the man, but at the same time Paul hastens to point out that no man was ever born without a woman. While it is true that in verse 7 Paul points out that the woman is

the glory (doxa) of man, since she was made from man and not vice versa, he also underscores the aspect of interdependence of the sexes, not their inequality.<sup>52</sup>

While in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul portrays woman in a subordinate role, one cannot interpret this in the sense that the apostle was disrespectful of women. On the contrary, a quick glance at Romans 16 leads to the conclusion that Paul highly respects women. In this chapter, for example, Paul refers to several women by name. Never once do we find an indication that he speaks of women in a condescending fashion. When he refers to Phoebe, for instance, he speaks of her rather respectfully as a sister in the faith. In fact Phoebe is called a deaconess.

From Philippians 4:3 one gets the impression that Paul had real fond memories of a number of women who assisted him in his missionary activities. In short, we have ample reason to believe that Paul regarded them as copartners in his missionary activities and not as subordinates.<sup>53</sup>

But how can we reconcile all of this with 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35 where Paul denies women the privilege of speaking in the church. The text reads, "As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church" (RSV).

In order to get of the dilemma posed by this "harsh" statement

some scholars have carefully examined this text in its context and have decided that this passage must be a later interpolation. Cousar<sup>54</sup> has argued that this passage disrupts the flow of the argument and contradicts 1 Corinthians 12:2-16 where mention is made of women participating with men in praying and prophesying.

Barrett<sup>55</sup> favors the view that verses 34, 35 represent a later addition as a marginal note for in his opinion they can be explained as being based upon 1 Timothy 2:11ff. On the other hand, he is hesitant to fully endorse this position because he holds that it cannot be substantiated by the textual evidence. Since it cannot be conclusively shown that verses 34-35 represent a later interpolation we accept its Pauline authorship.

What is the essential message of these verses? Women are to keep silence in public services. In the opinion of some, women had been claiming equality with men in the matter of the veil, for they discarded this mark of subjection in church. It is inferred that they had also been attempting to preach or ask questions during the service. In the light of 1 Timothy 2:12 it is clear that Paul forbids them to become involved in teaching (didaskain de gunaiki ouk epitrepo). How were they to relate to men? Apparently Paul emphasizes the point that they, instead of having dominion over men, were to be in subjection to them even as also the law says.<sup>56</sup>

Commenting on the command that women should be silent in church, Barrett<sup>57</sup> has pointed out that it does not mean that they should take no interest in what happens in the assembly of which

they are members. However, if they wish to learn anything they are to ask their own husbands at home. Upon careful examination of the various views held by scholars relating to the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Clark makes the following observation: He holds that the real issue in this passage is most likely due respect and good order rather than cultural accommodation or doubts about the intellectual abilities of the women. He emphasizes the point, however, that the only reason the apostle offers for the limitation on women's speech is their subordination.<sup>58</sup>

He summarizes his findings pertaining to 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 by stating that in both passages Paul indicates that he is very concerned about relationships and the patterns that preserve their relationship.

But why does Paul emphasize the subordinate position of women in the two passages of 1 Corinthians? The S.D.A. commentary presents the reason for it as follows: It is on account of her part in the fall of man that it was no longer practical for husband and wife to have an equal authority in the leadership of the home.<sup>59</sup> The position assigned to her by God is that of subordination. In our present passage, however, Paul is concerned with the subordination that is specifically a part of being a woman. In this connection Clark reminds us that the context of this passage draws on the various customs and rules that governed expressions of respect. In other words, people are usually expected to speak in a manner appropriate to their position and relationships, even if they

are highly educated. A trained disciple in first century Palestine, for example, would hardly dare to express his opinion in the presence of his rabbi or any other rabbi. In like manner, disciples, wives, and sons would consider their speech as an expression of respect for those of a higher social rank or order.<sup>60</sup>

In Ephesians 5:22-24 Paul admonishes wives to assume a role of subordination in relation to their husbands (see also Col 3:18 and 1 Pet 3:1-6). All these references emphasize the submissive roles wives are to play in relation to their husbands.

It is noteworthy that in both Ephesians and Colossians the code of household duties is subsumed under the catechetical heading, "be subject." In his comments on Ephesians 5:22-23 Simpson observes that the Christian community upholds "the ties of kinship or subservience recognized by the law of nature itself" as valid. In other words, the loyal wife's subordination to her husband is based in part on her physical constitution.<sup>61</sup>

But as Simpson has pointed out, "the Christian spouse discerns therein a similitude of her union with the Kinsman Redeemer of His people." The husband's love toward his bride, on the other hand, is measured by that of Christ who gave Himself in self-sacrifice for His church.<sup>62</sup>

Thus far we have observed that in the two passages of 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 Paul sees women in a subordinate role to men. At the same time he highly respects them, especially those who at one point were coworkers with him. From Paul's perspective

the body of Christ has a structure and the woman is part of that structure as one person with her husband. Both in turn are under the headship of Christ. (1 Cor 14:34). But how does this position match his glowing declaration in Galatians 3:28? Doesn't the apostle contradict himself? Or are his statements in Galatians merely a temporary outburst of enthusiasm? Could we assume with de Wolf that Paul really did not fully realize in his own practice the implications of his teaching?

Would it be conceivable that on one hand Paul was a sensitive instrument of God at the growing edge of revelation, while on the other hand he was a son of his times, unable to free himself from the customary assumptions and practices of his age?

It appears to this writer that those who maintain that Paul contradicts himself on the question related to slavery and sex distinctions overlook the main point Paul is making in Galatians 3:28, namely, that in matters pertaining to salvation all human beings are equal, regardless of their ethnic, social, or sexual differences. Redemption through Christ results in the experience of a personal freedom which works from within and does not seek to overthrow any existing social order or differences. In other words, in Galatians 3:28 the apostle does not proclaim the equality of all people in Christ, except in the sense that all people in Christ are free from the differentiations of status introduced into the worship of God by the Mosaic law. The evidence does not support the view that Galatians 3:28 does away with all role differences among



Christian people. Therefore there is no need to raise the question of a serious incompatibility in Paul's thought.

### **Conclusion**

Galatians 3:28 is not the locus classicus in Paul's teaching about men's and women's role in the Christian community. As we have indicated above, there are six other main texts in the NT which focus on the role of women, but those will be treated elsewhere.

Galatians 3:28, however, forms the climax of Paul's argument in his dispute with the Judaizers. This Judaizing element insisted that one's salvation depended upon strict obedience to the Torah. More specifically they placed special emphasis upon the practice of circumcision. These Judaizers, it seems, did not only seek to impose legalistic practices upon the Gentile converts, but they also discriminated against them.

In view of this problem the apostle at once declares that through baptism the believer can experience a new relationship with Jesus Christ rather than through the observance of the Torah.

Being in Christ, then, results in a spiritual partnership in mutual love. It can hardly mean, as some have suggested, that henceforth all social, religious, and natural distinctions are no longer relevant. The argument that there is a tension between Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians 11:11 or 1 Corinthians 11:34ff. loses its force when we consider that there is no evidence in support of

the view that Galatians 3:28 does away with all role differences among Christian people.

There can be no question that Paul highly respects women and especially those who at one time were his co-workers. However, it is important to bear in mind that there is a major difference in the outlook that exists between Paul's contemporaries and modern Christians. Jews and Christians of the first century were greatly concerned about their status before God. Consequently for men and women to have the same status before God was a point of great importance. And Paul assures his readers that in Christ all ethnic groups, slaves, men, and women could experience that equality.

On the other hand, Paul has a very clear vision of the structure of the body of Christ. According to his scheme the woman is part of that structure. She is one person with her husband while at the same time she is under his headship. In turn both of them are under the headship of Christ who is under the headship of God the Father. Headship here is to be understood in terms of headship authority rather than in the sense of source or origin.

## ENDNOTES

1. Hans Dieter Betz, Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia (Hermeneia, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979, p. 181.
2. It is noteworthy that in the first two parallel statements the apostle uses the expression ouk eni . . . oude while in the last statement he uses a kai, ouk eni arsen kai thelu. See Gen 1:27 arsen kai thelu (LXX). For a detailed analysis of the passage see Betz, p. 181.
3. Betz, p. 195.
4. Among those who take this position regard other passages as "conservative" or "traditional that express something of limited value." Among those who take such a position are scholars such as K. Stendahl, The Bible and the Role of Women; Jewett, p. 12; C. Parvey, "The Tehology and Leadership of Women in the New Testament," in Religion and Sexism, ed. R. R. Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), pp. 132-34; and V. Mollenkott, P. 25. It is noteworthy that the discovery of Galatians 3:28 as the major scriptural teaching on men and women seems to be as recent as the mid fifties. Most of the books written before 1955 either do not give it consideration as a passage concerning the roles of men and women or only mention it in passing. Stephen B. Clark, Man and Woman in Christ: As Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1980), pp. 138, 150, 688.
5. It should be pointed out here that those who consider Galatians 3:28 as a locus classicus, or major theological statement, hold that its main function is to help one understand incidental references. They claim that except for Galatians 3:28 all of the references to women in the NT are contained in passages with practical concerns about personal relationships or behavior in worship services. They are thus incidental. See Clark, p. 138.
6. Clark, p. 139.
7. Betz, p. 181.
8. Ibid.
9. P<sup>46</sup> gig Clement read dia pisteos. Paul uses the formula elsewhere either without (Gal 2:16, e.g.) or with the article (Gal 3:14; Rom 1:12, e.g.). P<sup>46</sup> has the whole phrase differently: dia pisteos Christou Igoou ("through faith in Christ Jesus"), Betz, p.

181.

10. For a more detailed discussion on this point are Hugh M. Riley, *Christian Initiation* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1974); Robert Murray, "The exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism in the Ancient Syriac Church," *NTS* 21 (1974): 59-80.

11. See on this prayer David Kaufmann, "Das Alter der drei Benediktionen von Israel, vom Freien und vom Mann," *MGWJ* 37 (1893): 14-18.

12. J. J. Meuzelaar (*Der Leib des Messias: Eine exegetische Studie über den Gedanken vom Leib Christi in den Paulus briefen*[Assen: Van Gorcum, 1961], pp. 84-85) holds that Galatians 3:28 is based on this prayer. This appears to be an untenable position.

13. Betz, p. 185.

14. Dennis R. MacDonald, "There Is no Male and Female: Galatians 3:26-28 and Gnostic Baptismal Tradition," *HTR* 71 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, July 1978): 320-21.

15. Betz takes this position in his lecture "In Defense of the Spirit: Paul's Letter to the Galatians as a Document of Early Christian Apologetics," in *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1976), pp. 99-114.

16. According to Betz the concept of freedom (<sup>ie</sup> eleutheria) was not merely a theological notion, but they regarded themselves as free from "this evil world" with its repressive social, religious, and cultural laws and conventions. See 2:4-5; 4:22-31; 5:1, 13.

17. Betz, p. 29.

18. Ibid., 18.

19. Ibid., pp. 29-33.

20. Clark, p. 141.

21. Ibid., p. 142.

22. Gerhard Ebeling, Die Wahrheit des Evangeliums: Eine Lesehilfe zum Galaterbrief (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [D. Siebeck] 1981), pp. 283ff.

23. Richard B. Hays, The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1--4:11 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), pp. 169ff.

24. Ebeling, p. 286.

25. Ragnor Bring, Commentary on Galatians (Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press, 1961), pp. 180-81.

26. Clark, p. 141.

27. See Ebeling, p. 291.

28. Herman N. Ridderbos, The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia, NIC, NT, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), p. 149.

29. Paul is acquainted with this formula (Rom 1:14). Both formulae seem to be combined and expanded in Colossians 3:11: "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman." See Betz, p. 191.

30. Hans Windisch, "Ellen," TDNT, 2:504-16.

31. Betz, p. 191.

32. Stephen Neill, Paul to the Galatians, World Christian Books, No. 25, 2nd series (New York: Association Press), p. 46; Ridderbos, p. 184.

33. Ibid., p. 149.

34. Charles B. Cousar, Galatians: Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press), p. 85.

35. See H. Windisch, pp. 504-516; also A. Steinmann, Die Briefe an die Thessalonicher und Galater, in Die Heilige Schrift des Neuen Testaments, ed. Fritz Tillmann, vol. 5 (Bonn: D. Hanstein, Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1935).

36. Ebling, p. 294.

37. Ibid.

38. Betz, p. 195.

39. Ibid.

40. The parallels 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11 do not have this line; cf., however, Matt 19:12; Mark 12:25 par. Rev 14:4.
41. Betz, p. 196.
42. Ibid., pp. 195-96.
43. Ibid., p. 199.
44. Holmer Kent, The Freedom of God's Sons (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 107.
45. Clark, pp. 137ff.
46. John Rf. W. Stott, The Message of Galatians: Only One Way, B.S.T. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1968), p. 100.
47. <sup>u</sup>Consar, p. 86.
48. Ibid.
49. Clark, p. 180.
50. F. W. Grosheide, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, gen. ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), p. 258.
51. Ibid., pp. 258-59.
52. Ibid., p. 259.
53. <sup>u</sup>Consar, p. 87.
54. Ibid.
55. C. K. Barrett, A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Chointhians, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1979), pp. 331-32.
56. A. Robertson and A. Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1983), pp. 324-25.
57. Barrett, p. 331.
58. Clark, pp. 183-84.

59. F. D. Nichol, ed., The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary 6 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), p. 793.

60. Clark, pp. 183ff.

61. E. K. Simpson, F. F. Bruce, Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1977), pp. 128ff.

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-29. It should be pointed out here, however, that many NT scholars consider the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians as deuterio-Pauline documents. This would imply that the counsel given her does not come from the apostle himself but from an author or authors of postapostolic times, a view we do not accept in this paper.

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